Your Hand In Mine
A SAIOUMA ZINE
TEAR AND RETURN TICKET STUB
ART BY
@3IQV3
RSVP
BY 3.10
LIVE
SHUICHI AND KOKICHI: ARE THEY DAT
HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Your Hand In Mine

A SAIOUMA ZINE

Dearly Beloveds,

Thank you so much for all of your support. We would not have made it this far without you. We hope you enjoy this this zine to the fullest!

To my wonderful writers, artists and merch artists: No amount of words can express the awe I feel at how you breathed life into this project. You have my sincerest gratitude for the passion and effort you've shown. With a team this wonderful and talented, every step of developing this zine has been a delight.

To my wonderful mods: Jen, Tate, Hope, Leo — This zine would never have been possible without your skills and creativity. I couldn't have asked to work with a better team for my longtime dream project. A big thank you to Kodu who's shown curiosity and helped around to the best of his ability, and to Ale who put us on track before having to step down due to unforeseeable circumstances.

And to you, our dear reader, whether you've been here since our interest check or only found us at pre-orders, we are lucky to have gotten your enthusiasm and engagement. Thank you!

— Nooty, Head Mod

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PART I.

PREGAME

Maybe you and I were lovers in a past life.

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FIRST ENCOUNTER

HOLD MY HAND

WRITTEN BY **SATURDAYSSUNDAE**
ILLUSTRATED BY **MOCHA**

"Okay, how long is this actually gonna take, babe?"

"It'll only take a minute, I swear! Probably!"

He holds poster boards under one arm, having stayed up all night decorating them, for his skeptical boyfriend. It's a chore having to put him on house arrest so he'll actually stay still and bear witness to several sleepless nights of labor. *Several.*

"I'm being held against my will." Kokichi's arms are folded over his chest as he looks over at the poster boards. "Is that purple glitter?"

"Yep!" Shuichi chirps, not missing a beat. "It'd keep your attention longer—look, I worked really hard on the costume, taking some inspiration from the various detectives from previous seasons. Take season 25's, the Naegi-Kirigiri grandchild? So, he—"

"Babe." He checks the time. "Did you even have breakfast?"

"Probably! So anyway, I just need your critiques. After that, I'll get out of your hair. Probably. I am *really* tired so I need some cuddles."

Again, Kokichi looks over at the assortment of glittery poster boards. "You stayed up for a whole week for this."

"Yeah, well, I added a lot of symbolism, so like—and I mean a *lot,* I think I'm now into fashion by accident? Speaking of, did you know that in 1889, they—"

"*Shuichi.*" Kokichi shakes his head. "You can tell me all about that *after* you get some sleep."

"Oh, I drank some coffee, I'll be fine." He waves his hand dismissively, already revealing the first on display. "So! Ultimate Detective, I—"

"You're still being a detective? Hasn't that been overdone already?"

Saihara's eye twitches. "*Yes.* I am. Ahem, so he's kinda on the shy side, a little passive—"

"Mhm."

"—and went through a traumatic event—"

"Literally every Dangan character ever."

"—but he's really focused on justice! And, it matters a lot to him that there's justice served in the event of awful things and people, and that need for justice is what fuels his descent into being a blackened." He sets down one board to reveal the next. "Exhibit A out of K of his psychology."

Kokichi chokes on the soda he'd grabbed on the coffee table. "This is excessive," he coughs, wiping his mouth.

"And you're awful at critiquing," Saihara huffs. "C'mon, I drank so much coffee to work on this I saw the face of God!"

"It's seriously not like it'll matter. They're just gonna write over everything anyway." He looks away, and Saihara finally realizes the issue as he lowers the poster boards on the floor.

"You don't want us changing."

He sits down beside him as Kokichi tugs at his hair. "...I'm happy for you. I am. But you're gonna forget me. And that's so *cruel*, Shuichi."

Shuichi wraps an arm around him, sighing. "No. I'm never gonna forget you."

"But you will."

"Mm-mm. Nope." He grabs a marker from the coffee table, writing over his previous work. "There. Take a look." Kokichi leans over, his brows creased as he slowly smiles.

"...Love interest, huh."

SAHOU

AISUDOKI

DANGANRONPA
CAFE

BETWEEN SCRIBBLED LINES

WRITTEN BY **HYPOXIA**

Too loud, Shuichi thinks. Even if the talkative stranger on the other side of the room does make it past the initial round and–God forbid–the callbacks, Shuichi can't imagine that he'd make it past the final selection.

He knows who's in charge of doing the casting for this season, and he's memorized their favorite character archetypes just like he'd done for each of his own favorite characters. Even if Team Danganronpa states otherwise, Shuichi knows that the selection is based purely on who they think will cause the biggest ripple, who can drag in the biggest viewership.

Another blabbering loudmouth? No, those are totally overdone. The audience is getting tired of them.

He's read Tsumugi Shirogane's name as it rolled through last season's staff credits, seen it pop up on fan blogs every so often. She's always been partial to those who deeply immerse themselves directly into their own respective narratives, and who embody the characters they're slated to play. If someone wants to be the Ultimate Something or Other, then they better be ready to devote their waking moment to honing those skills and burying their own personalities before Team Danganronpa ever gets their hands on them, or else they risk Tsumugi overlooking them entirely.

As for Shuichi?

Well, becoming the Ultimate Detective wasn't going to happen organically.

While Shuichi could pick apart fictional characters, dissect them as easily as he could an animal – real people were difficult. Real people aren't written by masterminds with a specific character arc in mind. No, they were confusing, complicated, and unpredictable, acting irrationally towards their own selfish goals with no straightforward narrative to fit themselves into.

At least, that's how most people perceived those around them. Shuichi, too, until he realized that all he needed to do was to shut up and listen. Watch without inserting himself into their story.

Real people weren't like fictional characters, but that didn't mean that they couldn't eventually be pushed into taking very specific actions under the right circumstances. Becoming the Ultimate Detective meant stepping aside and listening, before knowing when it was the right time to make a move. Make the person in question squirm, all to point towards a very specific conclusion.

Shuichi doesn't need to engage with this loudmouth chatting away to his friend, guffawing about his supposed chances of being a part of season's cast. No, all he needs to do is watch patiently from his corner of the waiting room, and when the time is right, Shuichi can set up a single interaction,

or maybe ask a particularly leading question, to get all of the information he needs about this man. Then, he can jot it all down and move onto the next target of interest.

Shuichi isn't stupid, and he knows what he needs to do if he wants even a chance of getting on Danganronpa. All of the individuals around him–they're just that.

People. People with their own hopes and dreams and ever changing aspirations.

Shuichi has already given himself up to the person he dreams of being in front of the cameras, and he has zero qualms with that. His golden ticket to getting there, though?

The notebook tucked closely against his body.

When the loudmouth finally ends his conversation, Shuichi flips open the notebook to one of the few remaining clean pages and jots down his thoughts. There are details about almost every other contestant currently in the room scribbled across the previous pages, written messily in black pen. Shuichi had been there for well over two hours at that point, waiting and watching.

For most, the audition began when the producer called them into the room. For Shuichi, it began the second he got his hands on the list of every person signed up to audition from an online friend who was just as obsessed with Danganronpa as he was. He could only pull so much information from social media, though it really was a lot–with the exception of one single candidate, he was able to pull out quite a bit of basic biological information about most of his competitors. The rest, he supplemented with his observations. Showing up a couple of hours early for his audition was such a small inconvenience to prove to the producers and Tsumugi herself that he has what it takes to reinvent himself as easily as they can.

At this point, the number of people in the room has steadily begun to dwindle. Shuichi knows that his audition is coming up soon, and with only about twenty minutes left, he isn't expecting soemone to run into the waiting room, chest heaving and eyes frantic.

He's strange, is the first thought to pop into Shuichi's head.

From his violet hair to the ugly scarf, the boy in front of him looks every bit the antagonist that Shuichi imagines he's trying to embody. But the softness in his gaze and the way that he seems to pull into himself while searching for a staff member says otherwise.

Then, *he seems kind*.

The small nod he gives Shuichi once they make eye contact says as much.

Glancing down at his notes, Shuichi realizes that this must be the final contestant who was scheduled to audition immediately after Shuichi.

Kokichi Ouma, reads the paper. He recognizes the name because of how little he knows about the boy behind it. The boy in front of him.

He can conjure up as many stories as he'd like–maybe Kokichi is trying too hard to fit into one specific narrative he's built up within his mind. Maybe he genuinely is a nice person, and that's why his eyes don't hold the same malice that his competitors do. But if he were truly kind, then why would he even bother auditioning for Danganronpa? Is he even a fan? That's what the seemingly total lack of an online presence seems to hint towards.

This boy could be the most boring, cookie-cutter type of contestant Shuichi's ever seen, or he could be his complete undoing.

The truth is that Shuichi doesn't know.

And when he's ushered into the audition room, that fact haunts him.

. . .

The atmosphere of the bookshop basement is heavy, as if all of the air has been stifled, pressed between the pages of ancient books. A number of tightly-packed shelves stretch across the small length of the room, and between the sheer number of books and the oppressive atmosphere of the poorly ventilated room,

Shuichi imagines that only a handful of books have been disturbed in the past few months. It's not as though the shop is ever packed. In fact, Shuichi considers it his own little private hideaway, hidden between shops whose facades give away exactly what's inside.

Shuichi never knows what he's going to find tucked away between imposing shelves of stained oak. Last week, it was a mystery with a stranger's ramblings written in the margins. Yesterday, a photo album that had somehow wormed its way into what was probably a stack of donated books.

Today, it's a boy.

Every time he walks into this shop, he finds little bits and pieces of humanity sprinkled in between lines, and in the background of pictures. This visit, he finds a reminder of his own humanity–of his own inability to decipher people like the archetype he so desperately wishes to become–standing right in front of him.

And because the universe's use of dramatic irony is never lost on Shuichi, he chooses not to walk away when he's approached.

"You're…" Kokichi begins, a barely audible whisper trapped in the space between them. They're the only two in the shop's basement, though Shuichi barely registers the footsteps of a single other person above them. "You were there, weren't you?"

Shuichi takes in the sight in front of him. The messy violet hair, the soft gaze framed by dark circles that make the boy appear so much younger than Shuichi assumed he actually was.

"Shuichi Saihara," is all he says in lieu of an actual answer to Kokichi's question. He doesn't know why Kokichi bothered talking to him as if they weren't competitors vying for a spot during one of the most cutthroat audition cycles on reality television. Surely he wasn't confident enough that he'd happily converse with anyone who might take it away from him.

Unless he was just being nice?

No, not nice. Polite.

"Shuichi."

Kokichi tries out his name, and Shuichi can't help the way his stomach jumps at the way it sounds on Kokichi's tongue.

Is this a game?

"And you are…?" Shuichi asks, suddenly remembering that he isn't technically supposed to know Kokichi's name.

The other boy's brows narrow a fraction as if he were surprised – like he'd been expecting Shuichi to already know who he was. It happens so quick, Shuichi might've doubted his own eyes, if he wasn't already so attuned to watching others' body language.

"Kokichi."

Kokichi Ouma, the only book in the whole shop he can't read. At least, not with looking in between the lines.

There's a split second of silence while Kokichi picks up him apart with those bright eyes, as if searching Shuichi's face for something he can' quite find.

And then things become awkward between them because Shuichi doesn't know what to say, doesn't know how to step out of the role of passive observer before he's finished investigating. His breath feels like it's trapped in his throat, caught in between getting swallowed down in a nervous gulp or slipping out into an uncomfortable cough.

Then, Kokichi decides to sidestep the elephant in the tiny basement entirely.

"Are you a fan of detectives?"

Shuichi blinks. "What?"

"Your books," Kokichi says, jutting his chin towards Shuichi's arms. "A book on inductive reasoning, a psychology textbook, and a children's mystery series. You're into that sorta stuff?"

And because Shuichi doesn't know how to lie, he dumbly nods.

"Detective Shuichi Saihara, then," Kokichi says, drawing his tongue along the syllables of Shuichi's name. "Is that why you're auditioning for Danganronpa? To be Ultimate Detective number fifteen?"

"Sixteen," Shuichi corrects. Then, an idea pops into his head a split second before he adds, "And if you ask that many questions after getting in, the audience would want you dead after two episodes."

Testing him.

Shuichi was just testing to see how Kokichi would react to him teasing just the slightest bit of unreleased information about the next killing game.

Kokichi's eyes widen a bit. "How did you know about…?"

Fascinating. They'd both been caught poking around information they shouldn't have even touched.

"So you somehow managed to steal information about the upcoming season and the new audience participation mechanism. What else do you know?"

"If knowing information I technically shouldn't makes me a thief, what does that make you?"

"A detective."

Kokichi eyes him warily as if suddenly understanding where Shuichi is coming from.

"I'm not trying to be the Ultimate Detective."

"You're a terrible liar," Shuichi says, though nothing about Kokichi's words suggests he wants to steal his spot. He's calling a nonexistent bluff, and for what? To try and shake something out of this stranger in front of him?

To know more about him.

But Kokichi only shrugs in the face of Shuichi's building curiosity. "I know I am."

Perhaps it's a purely selfish question, but he needs something to hold onto to in order to solidify his mind's incorporeal image of the boy in front of him. The question is already out of his mouth before he can even properly consider it.

"So if not a detective and not a thief, what are you? What do you want to be?"

Yet, it takes everything within him not to laugh when he sees the earnesty in Kokichi's eyes as he says:

"I want to be a hero."

It's naïve. Cute, even.

And as much as Shuichi wants to call him out on such a bland, childish answer, there's a part buried deep within his mind that wants to believe him – believe that perhaps this boy with the honest eyes that revealed his every thought might actually be some sort of hero were they to face off on Danganronpa.

And for once, Shuichi doesn't squash the thought.

"Alright then, *Ultimate Hero*," Shuichi says, inclining his head towards Kokichi. "I hope I'll get to see you again very soon."

DR
STUDENT

ESPAIR
TRUTH CAN BE FULL OF DESPAIR TOO
COMING SOON
Obstructing the doors can be dangerous
CAUTION
11037
YOUR

BEFORE THE STORM

WRITTEN BY **MAMICHIGO**
ILLUSTRATED BY **JOJO**

"You sure are walking freely, for someone who might be in danger."

In the almost empty campus of Hope's Peak, that voice was jarring. Shuichi swiveled, and squinted against the afternoon sun to find Kokichi waiting for him by the shade of a tree. His heart accelerated all the same, as it often did when they met up like this.

"Is this about the rumors?" he asked. "You're always walking around all by yourself, too. I'm surprised you can worry about anyone else in your situation."

"I'm not part of the school anymore. I dropped out, remember?"

They stared at each other for a moment. As always, he couldn't decipher the guarded, steely look in Kokichi's eyes, and Shuichi was the one to look away first.

"As if I could forget." Shuichi swallowed, and forced himself to stay on topic instead of wasting time trying to get Kokichi to answer *why*. Why did he leave—he shook his head. This wasn't the time to get distracted by his emotions. "I'm not sure what to feel about the rumors yet. Worrying over something that may not even be true will just mess with my head—"

"When was the last time you saw Kaede?" Kokichi cut off.

A chill ran down Shuichi's spine.

"She didn't come to school often to begin with," he argued. Shuichi could see Kokichi clench his jaw, his shoulders stiff. "...You're serious about this."

Kokichi smiled so his teeth showed. It didn't reach his eyes. "When am I not?"

"Kokichi, this whole thing is absurd." Shuichi ran a hand through his hair. "Experiments to see if they could permanently change our talents—What's the point in that? And wouldn't someone start noticing the kidnappings eventually?"

"I don't have the answers to that yet. That's why I'm trying to find out more—"

"I'm not a *detective*, I'm sorry. I just—I can't help you with this."

"That's fine—or not. Actually, it's not fine." Kokichi gnawed on his thumbnail before throwing his hands up in exasperation. "I'm worried about you, can't you see that?"

"I know." Hesitant, Shuichi walked closer, then laid a hand on Kokichi's shoulder. "Sometimes it feels like that's all you do."

"Someone has to."

"I'm concerned about you too, Kokichi. You disappear for weeks and turn up out of nowhere... How would I know if they took you first?"

"You wouldn't," Kokichi mumbled, realization dawning on his face. "*Shit*."

As he saw the lost way that Kokichi fidgeted with his own hair, nerves and even *fear* written all over his face and body language, Shuichi made a quick decision.

"Kokichi, wait for me at the school gate. Every day, at the same time." Shuichi smiled, trying his best to be comforting. "I'll meet you after classes. If either of us doesn't show up, then something has to be wrong. Right?"

"That might actually work. Yeah." He looked up at Shuichi. "We can protect each other...for sure."

Although it was meant as an affirmation, Kokichi's words shook at the end, gaining an inflection like it was a question. A desperate attempt to convince himself.

Just then, a sunbeam fell over Kokichi as the clouds shifted; for a split second, Shuichi might have seen tears shine in his eyes. Before he could confirm it, Kokichi ran into him. Shuichi almost toppled over with the strength of his embrace, but laid a protective hand on his back.

He could feel Kokichi tremble in his arms.

"Don't go disappearing on me, or else I'll go running after you," Kokichi whispered.

"I'm counting on you."

He hugged him a little tighter for good measure.

PART II.

INGAME

I reach out to him, but he doesn't take my hand.
But in his own way... I think that helps me understand him a little.

23 SHINYEU

24 CRYSTALRINA

25 INU

26 NIINIA

27 MYAAMI

32 CELCHUNO

34 ZHIFEIJI

36 MIMCA

38 CATRÍONA

39 ARCEE

40 RANNAS

42 EMLINART

43 ASH DOODLES

LET'S

緒に恋しましょ

TOGETHER

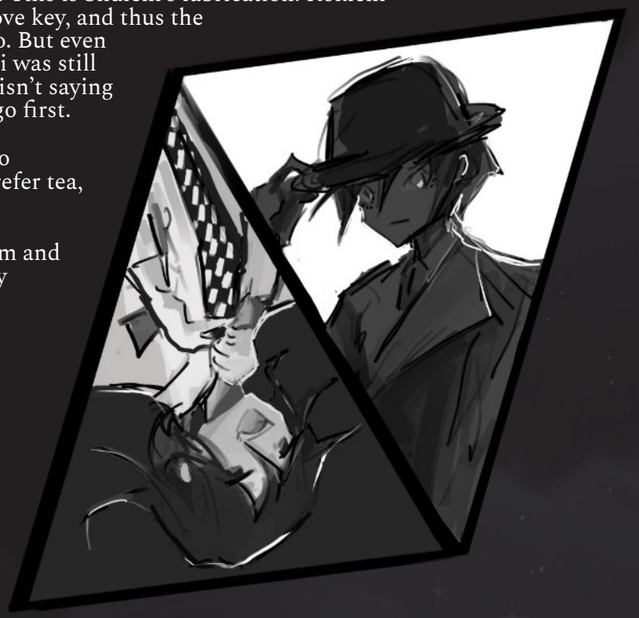
A LIAR'S REPOSE

WRITTEN BY **MYAAMI**

ILLUSTRATED BY **AISUDOKI**

The scene is straight out of a film noir. Shuichi's standing in the doorway, the light from out in the hallway illuminating his silhouette. He's got on a long trench coat and a bowler hat, extremely unlike the attire he usually wears. Kokichi himself is dressed in a crisp white suit with a checkered tie and a purple pocket square. The room is plastered with wanted posters alongside painted masterpieces, all surrounding an elegant bed with a view of the city skyline and the accompanying scent of freshly brewed coffee.

A hideout, Kokichi decides. *His* hideout as a phantom thief, if he has to guess. A little gaudy and unrealistic, but he's not the one who designed it. This is Shuichi's fabrication. Kokichi invited himself into Shuichi's fantasy with the love key, and thus the room and their roles are of Shuichi's making, too. But even though Shuichi is the big time producer, Kokichi was still cast in the role of a lifetime—and since Shuichi isn't saying anything, it must be Kokichi who is scripted to go first.



"Coffee's ready," Kokichi says conversationally to Shuichi's silence. "Hate coffee, though. Much prefer tea, so help yourself, Detective."

Shuichi startles from his examination of the room and steps across the threshold. The door shuts firmly behind him. "Detective?"

"Hm? Are you not?"

Shuichi redirects his gaze down to his outfit, holding out his arms for an inspection.

Kokichi can't help himself. "A little big, but it suits you."

Shuichi moves a hand to cover his mouth, as if it could hide his reddening face.

Likes honest compliments, Kokichi notes.

He laces his fingers together and looks to the side to allow Shuichi a moment to recover. While he's surveying the room and his own outfit, he realizes there's something heavy resting in his suit pocket. It must be part of the show. Some kind of prop. And based on the room's careful presentation of dozens of sparkling gems, he has an idea as to what it might be.

“You can do whatever you want to me and that’s the truth.”

Shuichi is lowering his hand, ready to move on, but Kokichi doesn’t want to relinquish control just yet. He would be remiss if he didn’t explore Shuichi’s fantasy to its fullest extent and see how much sway he has here.

“I’m impressed you managed to track me down,” Kokichi says. “But you won’t be able to take them.” He nods to the jewels on display. “Those beauties are protected by a motion sensor system that’ll explode if you get too close. I’d recommend you don’t.” He winks. “I like you just the way you are.”

“But what about your most recent operation?” Shuichi asks. “The one you just returned from. You said ‘those jewels,’ so I’m assuming tonight’s heist was successful.”

Kokichi lets out a low whistle. Shuichi is sharp as always.

“There might be another.” Kokichi circles around to the coffee maker, biding for time. He pours two cups, then hands one to Shuichi and brings the other to his lips. “But I’m not telling,” he whispers. “Not even if you tie me up. Cheers!” Then he immediately dumps his drink down the drain.

If Shuichi had been a little faster to take a sip, his coffee would be all over the floor. “T-Tie you up! I would never—”

Kokichi takes another mental note.

“Then what are you planning on using the bed for?!” he shouts. “To take a nap?”

“Of course not! I’m here to tell you that you’ve been caught, that’s all. I called the cops the moment I arrived.”

Kokichi smiles; it’s cute when Shuichi acts all tough, but it’s most certainly a performance, even if it is his fantasy. His legs are shaking.

“You can play as many games as you like,” Shuichi goes on. “But it’s no use, Kokichi. I know your secret.”

Kokichi keeps his smile carefully frozen in place. *Kokichi,* huh? Very interesting.

“And I know yours, Detective Inspector Shuichi. The real reason you’re here.” Kokichi leans forward into Shuichi’s space, close enough to smell the coffee that barely touched his lips. “And let me just say… I feel the same. I love you, too.”

His response is better than Kokichi had imagined. Shuichi sucks in a deep breath as if he didn’t quite believe his ears, yet stops short of asking Kokichi to repeat himself. It’s a beautiful reaction, but considering that Kokichi has barely given Shuichi a moment to collect himself—and the fact that it’s *Shuichi’s* fantasy in the first place—Kokichi wonders if he took it a little too far. Maybe he should back off until he better understands the game, but where’s the fun in that? Shuichi called him by his real name. Kokichi is more than just a bit player in this story. He can’t back out now.

Finally, Shuichi gets back in character. “Your lies won’t work on me,” he says.

“Oh, I’m not lying. Wanna feel my pulse? I’m as calm as ever.” Kokichi extends his arm, and Shuichi takes the time to roll up the sleeve of Kokichi’s suit.

“Your pulse is racing.”

“I wonder why.”

At the same time, they look down at their positions. They’re standing together, hand in hand, with barely a foot separating them. Shuichi drops Kokichi’s wrist and takes a step backwards. Kokichi matches him forward in perfect synchrony.

“Well, Shuichi? What should we do until the cops show up? I can think of lots of things.”

“Y-You shouldn’t joke like that.” A step backward. “It gives off the wrong impression.”

“I’m not joking. And I’m not lying, either.” A step forward. “You can do whatever you want to me. And that’s the truth.”

They dance together like this until Kokichi’s got Shuichi backed up against the edge of the bed.

“Kokichi…”

Kokichi pushes Shuichi down hard. Impulse control was always one of his faults.

“Kokichi wait, wait!”

But no one can say that Kokichi doesn’t understand consent.

“…Just kidding. Did I get you?”

“What?!”

Kokichi kicks it into high gear towards the door. His heart is pounding way too fast. He almost blew it. This is supposed to be Shuichi’s fantasy, and here he is taking it a literal step too far. He never should have done it. Never should have grinded coins in the casino for the key. It’s a cheat. A quick way to discover Shuichi’s deepest desires, none of which include him in the way he wants. Foolish. At least he can escape with most of his dignity intact. At least Shuichi won’t remember this when he wakes up.

“Kokichi, stop right there!” Shuichi has maneuvered himself into a sitting position but doesn’t seem able to follow. Not willing to, that is. Yep. Kokichi knew it. God, he’s embarrassed.

“Thanks for playing with me, Shuichi.” He fails to sound anything other than strained. “It was fun, really. Make sure you excite me next time, too.”

He’s turning the knob and is halfway outside when the door is wrenched from his grip.

“You… you can’t,” Shuichi says, not meeting Kokichi’s eyes, and for once, it’s a good thing; Kokichi’s mouth is hanging open speechless as he registers how fast Shuichi ran over to him. “I don’t want you to leave.”

Oh?

“I haven’t uncovered the truth,” Shuichi elaborates.

Oh.

The stolen gem. That’s what Shuichi must be talking about. Kokichi pulls the fabricated jewel from his pocket and pushes it into Shuichi’s hand.

“Here. Also, I was lying before about the explosives. Operation ‘recover the stolen goods’ complete.”

“This isn’t the truth I’m looking for, Kokichi.”

“That’s all you’re gonna find, Shuichi.”

He tries to duck under Shuichi’s arm, but Shuichi counters by shifting into the center of the doorway. Kokichi rests his hands on Shuichi’s chest, feeling the smooth fabric of the uniform jacket. Shuichi has Kokichi trapped. This is exactly where Kokichi wants to be, but not if Shuichi doesn’t want it, and he already made that abundantly clear.

“This isn’t the truth I’m looking for, Kokichi.”

“That’s all you’re gonna find, Shuichi.”

Shuichi drops the gem and once again rolls up Kokichi’s sleeve—this time the frayed and tattered edges of his white Ultimate uniform shirt. His suit is gone, he realizes. It disappeared along with

Shuichi's trench coat, replaced by what they wear every day. The moment Shuichi stepped away from the bed, the game changed.

It changes again as Shuichi takes Kokichi by the wrist and leads him back to the edge of the bed.

"Will you close your eyes?" Shuichi asks.

Kokichi resists the temptation to immediately comply. It must come off as wariness, because Shuichi elaborates.

"I'd like to play truth or dare. And I… want your reactions to be honest."

"Dare," Kokichi says. He can't lie anymore, and speaking the truth would be a disaster. He needs to do something to catch Shuichi off guard, but Shuichi seems prepared. His countenance has changed since the start of the dream. He's more sure of his role, even as Kokichi becomes less sure of his.

"Close your eyes," Shuichi instructs. "I, um, I'm going to kiss you. Is that okay?"

Kokichi leans in and does it first, quick and chaste, because Kokichi would lose everything if Shuichi went first.

"Your turn," Kokichi says, playing it off as if it were nothing.

"Dare," Shuichi says without hesitation.

"Close *your* eyes this time. And count to three."

Shuichi stares hard at Kokichi, breathless and eager and beautiful, then sits up straighter and counts in good faith.

"One."

Kokichi slides off the bed.

"Two."

He backtracks and opens the door to the room.

"Three."

The door clicks shut, and Kokichi wakes up alone in his academy bedroom.

He was stupid. So, so stupid. No way was that Shuichi's fantasy. The key was a lie. That dream didn't show Kokichi anything other than his own daydreams, and he's a fool for wanting to go back and see more.

His foolishness doesn't stop there, either. For a full minute he contemplates rolling out of bed and knocking on Shuichi's door, but without the protection of the dream, Kokichi can't guarantee he'll be in control of his reactions. He was nearly past the point of no return last night. He should keep away.

Still, the way Shuichi looked at him and took over the situation…

Yeah, he definitely wants more. But seeing Shuichi in person is too risky. Instead, Kokichi decides that the plan for the day will be to avoid Shuichi at all costs while simultaneously trying to savor the taste that the dream left on his heart and his lips. Coffee. That's what he needs right now. A nice cup of coffee.

He'll have to go to the kitchen to get it. There's a chance he'll be spotted, but he has to do it. He has to remember the dream in full.

By the time he arrives at the dining hall, somebody is already waiting.

"Kokichi. Good morning."

It's Shuichi, fully alert and locked onto Kokichi the moment he crosses the threshold.

"Morning."

"Did you… have a good night?"

—Kokichi leaned in and stole the initiative that was meant to be Shuichi's. Though the kiss was fleeting, he could hear Shuichi sigh, and god, he wished he had stayed for more—

"If you only knew."

They wait in silence as the coffee brews, with Shuichi eying it so intently that Kokichi thinks he's going to burn a hole straight through the pot. Kokichi serves two mugs when it's ready.

"I didn't know you drank coffee," Shuichi says.

"I don't."

Kokichi pours his out into the sink and lets the scent further fill the air. Shuichi brings his cup to his mouth, breathing it in before returning it to the counter.

"It's not enough, is it?" Shuichi asks.

"Huh?"

"The coffee. It's not good enough. It can't take you all the way. It only brings back pieces."

"Piece of what?"

"Memories," Shuichi whispers, "…of last night."

"Of…"

Last night?

A lot of things click into place very, very quickly. The reason for Shuichi's questions. The reason for him being here in the kitchen in the first place. Shuichi wanted to know if it was real. If they were both there in the fantasy, together.

Shuichi had a key too. They used it on each other. That's why their clothes changed to what they wear everyday. Their ideal fantasy doesn't involve criminal hunts throughout the city. It involves the two of them, right here and now, just the way they are: liars, the both of them, for denying their feelings for each other for so long.

"You know, I was rude before," Kokichi says. He touches the collar of Shuichi's shirt and trails his fingers down. "I didn't ask you if you also enjoyed your night last night."

"I did," Shuichi breathes. "But… I think it ended too early. We only made it through one round of our game."

"Mm hmm. I dare you to do something about it."

Shuichi is pulling Kokichi in close before he even finishes speaking. The sensations from the night before come rushing back in full force, but it's *real* this time, and without the pretense of lies and deception, Kokichi throws away his own discretion and fully embraces the fantasy standing before him.

YOUR TIME'S FINALLY UP, JOKER.

NOW TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE HIDDEN THE JEWEL OF HOPE!

OR WHAT?

YOU GONNA ROUGH ME UP WHILE I'M ALL TIED UP AND HELPLESS UNDER YOU?

T-THAT'S NOT --!?

AW, WHAT A SHAME, MISTER DETECTIVE!

I WAS GONNA LET YOU DO WHATEVER YOU WANTED TO ME ANYWAY,

CUZ I LOVE YOU, SAIHARA-CHAN♥!

. . .

. . . DID YOU JUST SAY "SAIHARA"?

JUST KIDDING!!!

WAIT, OUMA-KUN!

!?!?

C-COME BACK . . .

YOU'RE ASKING WHY DON'T I JUST STOP LYING?

WAHHH, SAIHARA-CHAN YOU'RE A HORRIBLE LOVER! YOU JUST WANNA CONTROL MEEE!!!

...THAT'S NOT IT.

OUMA-KUN... YOU ALSO WANT TO END THIS KILLING GAME, RIGHT?

EVERYONE WILL DEFINITELY BE KINDER TO YOU IF YOU JUST... OPEN UP TO THEM.

...SAIHARA-CHAN USES THE TRUTH TO AVOID INNOCENT DEATHS.

AND I USE LIES WITH THE SAME PURPOSE! WE'RE SORT OF LIKE PARTNERS—OUR BELIEFS ARE DIFFERENT BUT OUR GOAL IS THE SAME!

SUPER COOL, RIGHT? IT'S SUCH AN EXCITING! INTRIGUING! ROMANTIC DYNAMIC!

NO WONDER I FELT LIKE WE WERE LOVERS IN A PAST LIFE!

SO, INSTEAD OF CONVINCING ME TO CHANGE,

I'D BE HAPPIER IF SAIHARA-CHAN PRAISED ME FOR BENG SUCH A GOOD PARTNER!

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THROUGH THE CRACKS

WRITTEN BY **MIMCA**

ILLUSTRATED BY **OLLIE LUMBY**

"And I stepped through the floorboard."

Kokichi laughed, rubbing the fresh blood off his forehead, and it made something knot inside Shuichi's stomach. The Ultimate Supreme Leader's laughter was supposed to be big, bold, *boisterous*, imposing his presence into the room—not the weak chuckle of a kid trying to save face in front of his bully. Needless to say, he was even *more* worried.

"You stepped through a *floorboard*," Shuichi repeated dumbly.

"Geez, that got me go—od," Kokichi pursued, the concussion slurring his speech, almost as if he were *impressed*. He did not seem to care about Shuichi's concern at all. Or that Tenko had died–no, had been *murdered*–in the neighboring room, just an hour before. "'Cuz of this, I–I tripped and fell pretty hard."

"If you're going to lose consciousness, do it *after* you tell us what you've learned."

Kokichi's smile fell into an *O* of surprise.

Shuichi turned around to see Maki standing there, arms crossed over her chest and daggers in her eyes. He had to admit, she was so quiet, he had managed to forget she was there. Of course, the Ultimate Assassin had never liked Kokichi. No one really liked him in this sick parody of an academy, which was something the Ultimate Supreme Leader wore as a badge of pride. But none went to the point they would be happy to finish Chance's job.

The Ultimate Detective turned back. Kokichi's eyes were fixated on him, waiting, with a loose expression he had never seen on the Ultimate Supreme Leader's face. And yet it felt *familiar*.

Nothing came out of Shuichi's mouth.

Maki's right, whispered the rational voice inside his head, *we don't have time to play around. He tried to make a* joke *out of his injury, remember? He'll be fine. And he'll stay fine,* only if *you figure out who killed Angie and Tenko.*

And for a second, he noticed something *dark* swirling in Kokichi's eyes, swallowing the familiar juvenile light in them.

Just a fraction of a second, before Shuichi blinked the vision away, and the conscious mind of the Ultimate Supreme Leader asserted control again, never to admit a lapse. "O—oh, sorry, my bad! See, I wanted to re-research the seance, so–"

Ding-dong, bing-bong!

All three students jumped at the sound–Shuichi *despised* this almost Pavlovian response that had been pushed into his body so quickly. They did not need to listen to Monokuma's speech to know what it meant. A class trial was about to start.

Kokichi was, unsurprisingly, the first to recover from the stupor. "'Guess I–I'll tell you about it later! So s-see ya..."

The Ultimate Supreme Leader started to walk with small, uncertain steps. Instinctively, Shuichi's hand reached out to give him support.

But Kokichi's fingers curled away, so fast, that he almost fell under his own weight; before proudly steadying his footing.

Shuichi often wonders, now that the Killing Game is over, and now that he has made peace with the fact that Kokichi Oma had always been nothing but a phantom, what would have happened if he had not remained there, his arm forward holding empty air; leaving the other teenager to disappear in the shadows. If he had been more insistent.

If he had tried just a little harder.

!
4
2
3
1

PRESSING FEELINGS

WRITTEN BY **RANNAS**
ILLUSTRATED BY **ZHIFEIJI**

Echoes of footsteps sound through the metallic fortress, reverbing around Saihara's mind.

"C'mon," Ouma calls out, leaning with his hands clasped behind his back, "I thought you *wanted* to hang out with me." The voice bounces around the walls and in his head as he half-jogs to keep up.

"I did. I do. It's just—" His head throbs as he looks at the closed gate in front of them, covered in knife slashes.

Ouma's face goes blank. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just—" He trails off and blinks. The slashes are gone, and the gate is open. "Wait—"

"Huh?" Ouma waves a hand in front of his face. "Whoa, Saihara-chan is acting *weird*."

"I'm fine." Saihara lies, but the expression on Ouma's face makes it clear he didn't buy it.

Why Ouma chose this empty place to hang out, he has no idea. None of their classmates bother with the place (nor is it advertised as a date location for this absurd dating game). Not even the Exisals are here. They must be off doing various cleaning tasks around the Academy. So it's just them right now, surrounded by metal and the faint buzzing of electricity.

"Kinda overkill. Doncha think?" Ouma runs his hand along the metal plate of the giant hydraulic press.

"I guess."

Ouma sits on the plate, shadows covering his face. "Pretty dangerous, though... this could kill someone so *easily*." His words come out as if he's just lightly describing the weather.

Another strange pang, and Saihara sees the maw of the press closed—blood, so much blood. He blinks, and it's gone again.

"Y-yeah, it could." He agrees, swallowing down the bile and trying to quell the strange panic coursing through him. What were these strange thoughts, and why did they feel so *real*?

Saihara doesn't have long to wonder before Ouma lies on his back on the press, the metal plates dwarfing his small frame. "Do you think you'd feel it? Or would it be... *instant*?" There's a strange tone to Ouma's voice he's never heard before.

Saihara imagines the press lowering slowly and shivers. "H-huh? Don't say things like that!"

"Nishishi, Saihara-chan looks all scared! Don't be silly. Look over there!" He points over to the mechanism, his expression going oddly somber. "There's a safety function— it won't close if there's a person in here. So unless it was broken..."

"R-right."

"*Aww*, would Saihara-chan miss me if I got crushed?"

He clenches his fist and wants to tell Ouma off for joking around, but instead, he answers softly, "Of course I would."

"Really?" Ouma sits up, and wide eyes blink up at him from under the shadows. "You aren't lying, right? You know I can tell."

"No. I'm not."

Ouma is silent for some time, his fingers restlessly fiddling with the straps on his pants. "This place is boooring," he finally announces.

"Yeah... something about this place..." Their eyes meet, and strange images flash through his head so fast he can't make sense of them. *More blood, a desolate wasteland, cold and cruel laughter, a menacing Ouma reaching out...*

They need to get out of here. Saihara reaches out his hand. "C'mon, let's go."

Ouma tilts his head with an exaggerated pout. "Go where? Isn't our date over?"

"Doesn't have to be."

"My beloved Saihara-chan is full of surprises!" Ouma smiles for the first time since they entered the hangar and meets Saihara's hand, allowing him to pull him off of the metal plate.

Their hands stay together a little longer than necessary as they exit, leaving the hangar and that strange, pressing feeling behind them.

PRT 2 DIE
MASTERPLAN!
NEED TO CONTROL!
ZZZ
BORING!
Trustworthy?
Suspicious!
nnoying
LOSER!

PART III.

POSTGAME

To find all that out, I shook the hand extended to me. He can lie about a lot of things... but he can't hide the warmth of his hand.

45 THE-EVERLASTING-ASH

46 OVERINE

48 IXCARUS

50 SOUMIC

51 OLLIE LUMBY

52 I8SAIOU4BR8FAST

54 MIDNIGHT

60 YULI

61 ZINNABUNS

62 BEAN

65 FUYU

66 FICTIONAL REALITY

THEY DON'T KNOW YOU
(LIKE I KNOW YOU)

WRITTEN BY **IXCARUS**

"Shuichi, check this out—you've been trending recently, you know that?"

Shuichi looks up from his dinner of cold chicken fingers and fries (because they're apparently old enough to have signed their lives away, but not to escape the *kids menu* at the hospital), raising an eyebrow at Kokichi's wide grin.

It's just the two of them, sitting across from each other in this specialized dining room for the recovering participants of Danganronpa's 53rd season. When Kokichi catches his gaze, he slides his phone across the table.

"What now?" He sighs, already dreading what sort of social-media horror Kokichi might show him.

Kokichi giggles. It's tinny and rings hollow, the same way he laughed in the killing game. Shuichi hates it. "Looks like you got first place in the latest popularity contest. Congrats, the fans love you!"

"You say that like it's something to be happy about," Shuichi says, peering at the screen despite his reluctance. Already, he feels his skin prickle uncomfortably at the thousands of comments, and some errant part of him wishes he had his hat. He swallows the thought before Kokichi can read it.

With a sigh, he continues scrolling until his eyes catch a familiar, smiling face.

Shuichi looks up. The same exact eyes greet him, but there's something different too. Maybe a little duller, jaded and opaque. "You managed to get second."

A snort. "Ah. So I did, I guess."

"You don't sound that excited about it?"

Kokichi stares at his nails. "Why would I be? As if anyone watching through a screen understands what sort of person I really am." A pause. "They like Kokichi Ouma—the liar, the one who failed to end the killing game—and not *me*. While I'd love to dissect the average Kokichi enjoyer's brain to see *why* they like someone like that… I'm different, you know?"

…And yet, we've both kept these names. As much as they try to pretend that their past-selves are nothing more than strangers, these vestiges of the killing game still linger like sticky bits of plaster.

"Those people have no right to say that they love me—in fact, I'd rather they hated me!" Then, so quiet that Shuichi isn't sure if he's supposed to hear, Kokichi says: "That, at least, would be easier to understand."

His heart twists at Kokichi's words. "…Then what about me?" He asks, feeling strangely bold. "If… If I said I love you."

A blink. Kokichi's eyes flit to his, unreadable.

"You, or Shuichi Saihara?"

"Is there a difference?" He smiles in return, easily. He knows when Kokichi is trying to bait him into a reaction, but two can play at this game. "No matter what you call me—no matter what the world calls you—I like to think I'll always be chasing after you. *You*… a mystery I want to spend every day solving. Maybe this is just the leftovers of the Ultimate Detective speaking but… I'd like to think that there's *some* truth to these feelings."

And *oh*, it's not often that Shuichi renders Kokichi flustered, but there's something oddly charming about the way Kokichi splutters, so unlike the way he was in the killing game. It makes Shuichi crave more—this strange new push and pull, or whatever else you might call this fragile, trembling feeling in his heart.

Maybe it's too early to really call it love, but Shuichi wants to chase it.

And when Kokichi turns red and says some excuse to quickly leave, giving a few more quips about this and that before rushing out, Shuichi can only roll his eyes. The other doesn't seem to know how to handle Shuichi's forwardness, but frankly, Shuichi is tired of being afraid of his words. He stands up, making his way to the exit too.

He's already lost the other once before.

This time, he'll keep his hand outstretched until Kokichi takes it.

2017
SERIES AWARDS
Ceremony
01 / 12 / 2017
Spike Chunsoft

PICTURE'S UP

WRITTEN BY **MIDNIGHT**
ILLUSTRATED BY **NIINIA**

"...and that's a wrap!"

Just as the clapperboard snaps shut, Saihara feels the strings of tension holding his body taut cut with a decisive snip. It happens each time that filming concludes for the day, but this time is different.

This time is the last.

It's strange, the energy on the set. Everyone is more than aware that there will be no more coming back in the morning to film the next episode, but no one wants to voice it. Saihara takes a deep breath, allowing it to exit his body one memory at a time. Every applauding face that his eyes pass over—co-stars, crew members, director and producers—none of this could have ever been possible without them, especially those who are only present to see the finale through.

Speaking of which, where—?

"Come on man, get over here!" Momota's arm encircles his shoulders without Saihara realising it, bringing the actor back down to earth before his thoughts could take him away. "No way we're taking our last group selfie without the star of the show!"

"I wouldn't say 'star', really." Saihara offers a small, comfortable smile as his friend guides them both towards the other actors. "Harukawa and Yumeno's characters made it to the end too, after all."

"Yeah, but those speeches you pulled out at the end? Come on, you stole the show and you know it!" Momota pulls them both into the centre of the growing group forming behind Angie as she holds up her phone, his attention now on wrapping his other arm around Harukawa's shoulders.

There is so much going on, so many voices and smiles surrounding him, and Saihara feels a glow of pride when he sees his own reflected on Angie's phone screen. The hum of chatter pauses for a moment as she taps the shutter button, and roars back to life just long enough for Amami to pull out his own phone.

Unsurprisingly, this goes on for much longer than usual. It makes sense that everyone would want their own version of their final group selfie, although that doesn't stop Chabashira from requesting that everyone upload theirs to the cast group chat before they forget. And even as the crowd disperses enough for everyone to regain some semblance of personal space, Saihara doesn't feel any less jubilant.

It's funny how much closer we are to each other than our own families by this point. I just wish—

A jolt passes through his body, not unlike a bucket of ice cold water.

That's right, I almost forgot! Ouma! Is he still here?

It's like watching another take roll on the screen. Except this scene plays out the same way, each and every time:

The cameras cut for the day. Any actors currently on set take a commemorative selfie together. Ouma absconds by himself. Everyone else leaves the set together to eat. Rinse and repeat.

Not this time.

"I'll be right back!" Saihara assures Momota before taking off at a jog, his eyes peeled for that distinctive black-and-white chequered pattern.

I have to know.

The cool night air further tempers Saihara's body as he exits the sound stage and makes for the actors' trailers. His steps hasten once he catches sight of the smaller boy and raises his hand in greeting.

"Hey, Ouma-kun! Wait up!"

Why?

Saihara can say, with complete and total honesty, that he has never seen Ouma surprised. As in, truly taken off guard. When the other actor turns to face him, it's as if he's seeing him for the first time.

I've got to make this count.

"Why did you leave? You know we're all going to dinner together, right? The studio's treat!"

Judging by the way Ouma's expression slides into something more familiar, Saihara did not, in fact, make his words count.

So much for that.

"Eh, you guys can go pig out together if you want. I've got something else to take care of."

WHEN THE OTHER ACTOR TURNS TO FACE HIM, IT'S AS IF HE'S SEEING HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME.

"Wait! I—"

Somehow, against all odds, Ouma doesn't completely turn away. Saihara swallows, tries not to worry about how audible that sound must be, and cuts to the chase.

"Could we hang out together, sometime soon? I really want to get to know you."

That makes it twice in Saihara's life that he's seen Ouma surprised. However, again, that expression is gone in the blink of an eye.

"Nishishi, you're so interested in me! Did I *actually* steal your heart away? Wow, I can't believe our rising star fell for lil' ol' me~!"

It's just like talking to Ouma the character. Is he always like this off the set too?

"N-no, that's not it! I just—"

Saihara shakes his head, eyebrows knotting together in a familiar tension.

He's good, I forgot just how good. The way he elicited my persona for the show just like that is...

He takes a breath, exhales, and fixes his gaze on Ouma.

"I just think it's a shame how despite all of us living here together for the duration of the show, we never actually spent much of that time together, away from the cameras. I'd like to remedy that...if it's alright with you."

For a long minute, Ouma stares back at him with a blank expression. A breeze whistles past them, ruffling the boy's bangs.

I know that I don't really know *Ouma. But I can still see the gears spinning in his head right now. It's interesting... has it really always been so obvious?*

As if a switch went off, a new light shines in Ouma's eyes. "Alright Saihara-chan, I'll give

you a chance! If you really mean it, meet me tomorrow morning at that café three blocks away. Don't keep me waiting!"

Before Saihara can open his mouth to clarify exactly *what* time and *which* café he had in mind, Ouma dips behind the trailer next to them. In the two moments it takes for Saihara to comprehend what just happened, Ouma is gone.

...I can't really say that I'm surprised. Looks like I'll have to get up early tomorrow.

. . .

If it wasn't already evident that Ouma was testing him, Saihara got his confirmation the following morning.

Slumping into a café chair perched on the sidewalk, Saihara removes his cap to fan himself for a few moments. There are still several episodes left to air before the series finale is ready for the public, and as far as they're concerned, the killing game participants are still wrestling with their horrible circumstances, far away from the everyday humdrum world outside the studio.

Half a minute later, Saihara hears footsteps coming his way. He slides his cap back on and lowers the brim against the morning sun, checking his watch as if to explain his behaviour to anyone passing by.

The director would kill me if I got recognised out here. What is Ouma trying to accomplish sending us away from the studio?

The footsteps stop beside Saihara. A wave of anxiety rises in his stomach, but before Saihara can begin to string a verbal escape together, he's beaten to the punch.

"Ooh wow, I'm impressed! I didn't know if you'd actually figure out when to come here, let alone actually go along with my little idea!"

> "I THINK I LEARNED A LOT MORE ABOUT MYSELF THROUGH THE COURSE OF THIS SHOW. I WAS HOPING I COULD LEARN MORE ABOUT YOU, TOO.

Saihara lifts the bill of his cap enough to look up at Ouma, a smile peeking out despite his previous anxiety now giving way to an entirely new bundle of nerves. "You said the café that's three blocks away, right? Luckily for me, there was only one that fit your criteria. And as for when, you gave me that clue when you told me where to go. Given that '3' is the first half of that code the fans have come up with about our characters, it follows that you had right now—10am—in mind."

Ouma answers with a low whistle, taking the matching chair opposite Saihara while adjusting the hood of his jacket. "Your detective persona isn't all made-up then, huh? I gotta say, I wondered how much of that was just for the show." He leans forward and rests his elbows on the table, eyes gleaming. "I like where this is going."

Saihara's nerves flutter, his smile widening in an attempt to hide them. "I just learned how to think in new ways thanks to this character. To be honest," he watches Ouma's face, cognisant of how easily the words come out of him now, "I think I learned a lot more about myself through the course of this show. I was hoping I could learn more about you, too."

Ouma observes Saihara in turn. A grin springs up on his face, and he leans backward in his chair so that it is standing on its back two legs. "Let's play a game then, Saihara-chan! You probably know me by now as a liar—the king of liars in fact—so let's see if you've learned how to figure me out."

Saihara blinks, surprised at this unexpected turn in the conversation. "Okay. What game are we playing?"

"Two Lies and a Truth!"

Saihara blinks again, then gives a light chuckle as he shakes his head once. "Isn't it supposed to be the other way around?"

"Not this time! So are you gonna play with me or what?"

"I will." He nods, then gestures for Ouma to continue, only for the other boy to shake his head.

"Nuh-uh, you're going first!"

"I am? Oh, uhm..." Saihara finds himself grabbing onto the brim of his cap again, trying not to show how flustered he is as he scrambles for three statements to use.

I'd suspect I'm fighting a losing battle there, though...

"Alright then: I travelled the world as a child. I got on the top ten scoreboard of an arcade game. I like to rock climb in my spare time."

Ouma snorts at that last statement. "It's definitely not that one." His eyes rove over the taller boy's face, and he nods a second later. "You got your initials on that scoreboard."

That was fast!

"How did you know?"

Ouma's grin couldn't possibly be wider. "It's a secret~."

Saihara mingles a sigh and laugh together. "I yield." He leans forward in turn, setting his sights on Ouma. "Now it's your turn."

Ouma's chair clatters forward again onto four legs as he directs an intense gaze back onto the other actor. "Are you sure you're ready for this? Once you learn the dangerous secrets I carry, there's no going back."

Saihara extends Ouma the kindness of not rolling his eyes. "I'm sure I'll be okay."

"If you're suuure..." He rests his elbows on the table and laces his fingers together, never breaking eye contact with Saihara. "I started every widespread internet conspiracy that's surfaced in the last eight years. I'm responsible for no fewer than thirty-six bank heists. I'm actually on the run."

Saihara watches Ouma as he thinks, on the lookout for telltale movements or expression changes, but unable to discern any.

It's just as well, Ouma-kun knows better than anyone how to keep a poker face. But he's not so cruel as to leave me with no clues. I just have to find it...

That's it.

Saihara sits up straighter, completely focused on the boy in front of him. "You're on the run."

Ouma's expression shifts in a split second, a delighted grin accompanying his arms flying behind his head. "Ding-ding, you win! Wow Saihara-chan, you're such an impressive detective!"

Saihara shakes his head, both to tamp down the blush creeping up his cheeks and to dispel the praise. "I wouldn't say so. This time your numbers didn't mean anything, the lack of one did. But more to the point..." He regards Ouma with a pointed stare. "What do you mean by 'on the run'? That wouldn't work for anyone regularly featured on a popular show."

A corner of Ouma's grin twitches. "Of course it would! It's called hiding in plain sight!"

Saihara shakes his head. "Ouma-kun... I don't think you meant it literally." Everything comes together in Saihara's mind as he speaks, "I don't know what your life was like before you

were cast in the show, but given the lengths you went to avoid the rest of us off the set, I'd guess that you haven't had the best experiences with others."

Ouma's posture stiffens, and Saihara tries to mend that with a friendly smile. "I understand that. The director wanted my character to be more timid and less confident than I am in real life, but overall it was just like playing an adjusted version of myself. If she had you do something similar, I can see why you'd decide our views of you ahead of time. But…" Saihara reaches his hand forward, letting it rest halfway between them on the table. "I actually enjoyed our scenes together, and if you're willing to give it a chance, I'd still like to know the real you."

A long silence fills the air between them. Ouma doesn't move at all. Before Saihara's heart can sink into a panic, though, Ouma opens a careful smile. "Geez, you're persistent! I guess I'll try you out, Saihara-chan."

Saihara mirrors Ouma's smile. And when Ouma's hand takes Saihara's, it grows even brighter.

Team Danganronpa lawsuit continues:

Public Shooting

CATFISHED
IN THIS YEAR OF THE LORD

WRITTEN BY **BEAN**
ILLUSTRATED BY **FICTION**

It's been three long years, but nothing prepares Shuichi to see Kokichi again—mostly skin and bones, a shock of white hair stuffed under a worn baseball cap. Here is Kokichi Ouma in the flesh after three years of radio silence, sitting at the table Shuichi reserved for his lunch date—reserved to spend time with someone *normal*, someone who didn't know about Shuichi's past—someone who didn't care for killing games in their spare time.

"So," Kokichi says, resting his chin against the palm of his hand, "looking for a change of pace, huh?"

Thanks to being mostly dead inside (an unfortunate side effect of being exposed as a freak to the general public at the tender age of seventeen), Shuichi avoids outwardly cringing as Kokichi recites the first (and only) line of his dating app bio with the delicacy of a ten-tonne truck. His survival instincts scream at him to bolt, but a litany of questions like *where have you been all this time* and *why are you just showing up now* running through his mind roots his feet to the ground.

It's only when a passing waiter gives him a strange look, that Shuichi hurries into the seat across his new lunch date to whisper:

"Why did you hide your identity on *Matchstick*?"

Kokichi stares at him.

"That's a terrible icebreaker for a first date, Saihara-chan."

"Wh—" Shuichi gapes at the smaller man. "You *catfished* me!"

"Now, now, 'catfished' is a pretty strong word when I went out of my way to schedule this heart-to-heart with you, Saihara-chan," Kokichi says, brushing aside Shuichi's protests with a wave of his hand. "If I didn't know you better, it'd almost sound like you were only here to get railed by a five—maybe a six with good lighting—who works a totally boring office job."

"…."

The pregnant silence that fills the air is an admission more pathetic than he'd care to admit, but something tells him that a rebuttal would only make it worse. Shuichi only hopes Kokichi might have some mercy and give him a few minutes of peace and quiet.

Well, who was he kidding.

Not even a second passes before the white-haired menace does an exaggerated double-take in his seat and cries out, "Oh, Saihara-chan! You mean you haven't been able to graduate from virginhood after all this time!?" Clutching at the front of his shirt, Kokichi dramatically wails, "Did I stop your *only* chance of getting *laid!?*"

Shuichi pinches the bridge of his nose, wishing for an instant that someone would put him out of his misery. Unfortunately, as the world would have it, it is easier to pretend Kokichi didn't just broadcast his social ineptitude before the entire family restaurant, than to be granted sweet relief from existence by a passing assassin.

“Why are you really here, Kokichi?” Shuichi asks with a resigned sigh.

Much to his relief, Kokichi stops fake crying to respond, “For the same reason that you’re here, obviously.” Leaning forward as if revealing a great secret, he concludes: “Just a change of pace.”

As if it’s ever just one thing with you.

Exasperated as Shuichi is about the situation, it's hard to fight the feeling of fondness that creeps in his chest. Somehow, in spite of all these years, Kokichi still had a knack for getting under his skin.

Even so, if he’s about to go down the memory lane with an ex-fictional mastermind, Shuichi is determined not to do it on an empty stomach. He reaches for the menu and flips to the first page.

“I guess we’d better get started with entrées.”

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LIVE
SHUICHI AND KOKICHI: ARE THEY DATING?
HAPPY BIRTHDAY

MERCH SHOWCASE

DIGITAL MERCH

JOJO Jojodapen Jojodapen Jojodapen

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PHYSICAL MERCH

RHEMY
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MOCHA
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SOBA sobashuu sobashuu sobashuu

YUNI yunimiho

KARU 8komori 4komori

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PANDALANA
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CRYSTALRINA
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CELE
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ikusabamukuro
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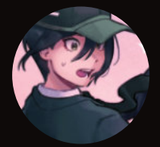

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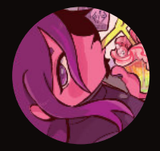

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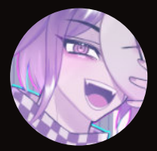

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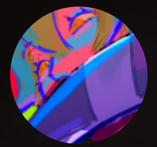

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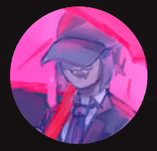

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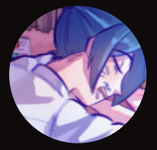

Yuli

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zhifeiji

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Zinnabuns

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p. 6 **Hold My Hand** by **saturdayssundae**
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p. 12 **Between Scribbled Lines** by **Hypoxia**
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p. 27 **A Liar's Repose** by **myaami**
myaami_rose myaami

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mimcanary

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p. 48 **They Don't Know You (like I know you)** by **Ixcarus**
ixcarus_ ixcarus Ixcarus

p. 54 **Picture's Up** by **Midnight**
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p. 62 **Catfished in This Year of the Lord** by **bean**
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